
International Maritime Officers School: Future Coalitions Fostered Today

By

**Lieutenant Commander Patrick (Kofi) Aboagye, USCG
United States Coast Guard International Maritime Officers School**

Steaming independently but under the operational control of the Sixth Fleet's Enterprise Battle Group and Command Destroyer Group 18, USCGC LEGARE sailed the Mediterranean and Baltic Seas from May through August 2001. In carrying out the cutter's assigned mission, the Portsmouth, Virginia based cutter's crew of 96 visited nine different countries.

Through these visits, sponsored by the Departments of State and Defense, USCGC LEGARE sought to engage, exchange operational experience and help strengthen the maritime capabilities of the host nations. Such efforts ensure that important and critical U.S. national security and foreign policy objectives are met. In Morocco, Tunisia, Turkey, Georgia, Ukraine and Croatia, the ship exchanged ideas and views on professional development, military-to-military material exchange and interagency cooperation.

Lieutenant Mike Loy, then Operations Officer of the LEGARE, said of the experience,

As with any diplomatic mission, there is goodwill all around and the outreach to the general population builds friendships and understanding between them and Americans. Of all the countries that we stopped in, those that had previous graduates of International Maritime Officers Course (IMOC) to liaise with were by far the most productive and the most rewarding.

The International Maritime Officers Course, one of two all-international courses offered by the International Maritime Officers School at Coast Guard Training Center Yorktown, is a ten-week program developed in response to a worldwide demand for professional maritime training for mid-grade inter-national military officers and civilians. The first IMOC class was convened in 1995. In June of 1998, as a result of increased worldwide demand, the School was created, offering the IMOC course as well as the two-week Crisis Command and Control International course. To date, the school has graduated 350 students from 84 countries.



Staff and members of IMOC class 3-01, representing 16 countries

Lieutenant Loy recounts of his European trip:

In Croatia, a young man that had just graduated from IMOC, Lieutenant Ljubo Radovnikovic (IMOC Class 1-2001), was our liaison officer. In Georgia, we had Major Gia Ivanishvili (IMOC Class 4-2000) as our liaison. In Tunisia, we had three liaisons that were all prior IMOC graduates. Each of the IMOC graduate representatives delivered outstanding service, from logistical support, to rest and relaxation, to sightseeing of Greek and Roman ruins. We could not have asked for more.



Children of a Croatian orphanage give approval to a play set donated by Lowe's Home Improvement Store in Williamsburg, Virginia, and built by USCGC LEGARE crew.

Our experience in Croatia was particularly remarkable," stated Lieutenant Loy. "Ljubo could say nothing but positive things. Every time we saw him, he would say something about his positive experience at IMOC." A prior Army officer, Lieutenant Ljubo Radovnikovic had fought in the Croatian War and had suffered from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder as a result of his experiences. His transfer to their maritime service and, shortly thereafter, his selection to attend IMOC accelerated the healing process immensely. Lieutenant Radovnikovic was selected as the Honor Graduate for IMOC Class 1-2001. Lieutenant Loy continued, "He feels that he owes the U.S. Coast Guard and the IMOC Program so much for being the individual that he is today. He says the experience here allowed him to get through that trauma and gain valuable professional experience that he is now applying to his job as commander of two Coast Guard boats.

The LEGARE's work in the Republic of Georgia was particularly effective due to the prominence of Major Gia Ivanishvili, IMOC Class 4-2000. The Georgians have made significant strides at modeling their Coast Guard after their U.S. counterparts. According to Lieutenant Loy, the Georgian Coast Guard was so impressed at the information provided by Gia upon his return

from IMOC, that they went out and modeled almost everything, right down to the buttons on their uniforms, after the USCG.



Parade of participant countries' flags at an IMOC graduation.

Working closely with the Georgian Coast Guard on a continuous basis are three USCG mobile training team members who provide daily hands on support, leadership and professional development to this emerging organization.

The presence of the decommissioned Coast Guard Cutter POINT COUNTESS, transferred through the U.S. excess defense articles program, is yet another example of cooperation between the U.S. and Georgia. The cutter continues providing service as a Georgian Coast Guard vessel patrolling the Black Sea. Lieutenant Loy recounted that upon arrival, LEGARE personnel provided outstanding and focused professional information on preventative maintenance needed for the 82-foot vessel. Overhaul of the .50 caliber machine gun was just one of many procedures which left a look of amazement on the faces of the young Georgian sailors – a very gratifying experience. The LEGARE crew also exchanged subject matter expertise on search and rescue, law enforcement, and weapons systems maintenance and repair. “At one point,” he said, “We farmed out our entire ship such that our crew members were at four or five different places engaged in professional exchange of information, helping to fix equipment, and doing things.”

The U.S. Coast Guard’s multi-mission maritime service experience has enormous international appeal as emerging maritime agencies seek to replicate our effectiveness with respect to operational flexibility, size and modest funding. All training and technical assistance is done at the request of either the Department of State or the Department of Defense. The Coast Guard receives more than 675 high-level international visitors each year who are interested in establishing or improving their own multi-faceted maritime agencies. The U. S. Coast Guard sends international training teams to over 50 countries and trains 2,500 students each year. In

addition, approximately 375 international students report to various Coast Guard training facilities inside the U. S. to attend training in over 400 courses. The Coast Guard also operates a Caribbean Support Tender the CGC GENTIAN, which, with a multinational crew, operates throughout the Caribbean and Latin America providing training and technical assistance.

As a unique instrument of national security the Coast Guard is being recognized more and more as an appropriate model for the maritime forces of foreign nations. The Homeland Security focus in which we are presently engaged can only heighten the usefulness of our Coast Guard's mission expertise to the nation and the world maritime community.

Programs like those of the International Maritime Officers School enhance the United States' ability to foster coalitions and effectively push our borders beyond our geographic boundaries.

About the Author

Lieutenant Commander Patrick (Kofi) Aboagye is presently the Assistant School Chief of the Coast Guard Training Center Yorktown's International Maritime Officers School. As human resources professional, LCDR Aboagye has also served in Coast Guard Recruiting and Reserve Programs Administration. He has considerable experience in Coast Guard shipboard operations, maritime law enforcement, and Search and Rescue in previous duty aboard the Coast Guard Cutter RELIANCE. LCDR Aboagye is a 1984 graduate of the United States Coast Guard Academy. He earned a Master of Science degree in Human Resources Management from Florida Institute of Technology.